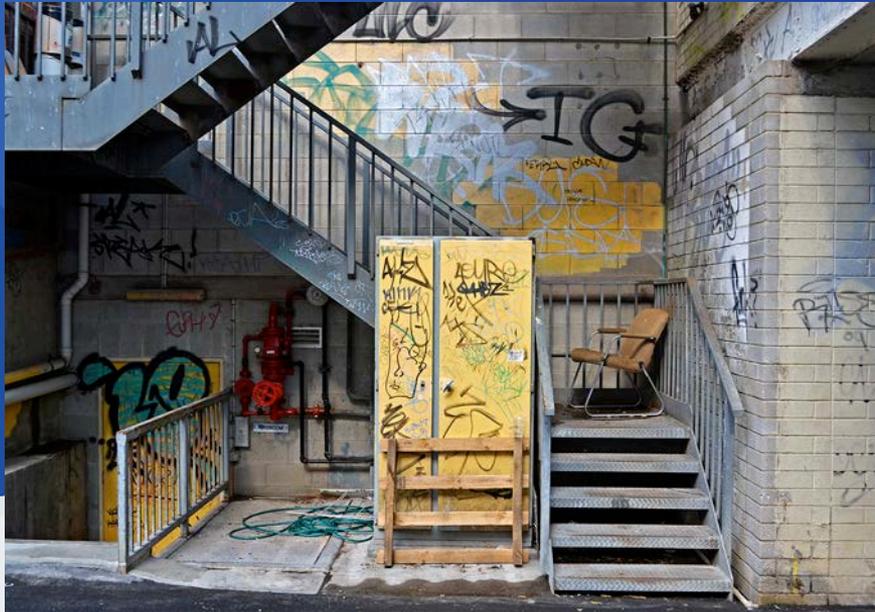


National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC)

Youth and Gendered Homelessness in Rural and Regional Australia



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Professor Andrew Beer
Dean: Research and Innovation
University of South Australia
Business School

Homelessness

Homelessness remains a large and growing problem across Australia, with the 2016 Census confirming further growth in the size of the homeless population. Previous work by Beer and Prance (2013) found that many local governments addressed homelessness, and did so in a variety of ways, including financial support for services, working in partnership, acting as a point of referral for homeless people, and the development of ‘upstream’ community-based interventions.

The respondents to our survey were asked to report the awareness of homelessness as an issue in their area (Figure 38). The data show that homelessness is a major challenge for about 10 per cent of local governments, and these Councils often face acute difficulties. In many instances – such as in the case of the City of Sydney – they have responded through the development of supportive, evidence-based policies. Other areas, however, have been less accepting of the homeless.

Agenda



- National context
- Pathways into and through homelessness
- Youth and homelessness in rural areas
- Gender and Homelessness in rural areas
- Sexual identity and homelessness

National context

- Highest rates of homelessness nationally in rural and regional Australia
 - Much of this homelessness is concentrated amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
 - Services are concentrated in the city
 - Often few options for rural-living homeless persons regardless of background, age or gender
 - Boom/bust housing markets
 - Eg Gladstone in Queensland

Pathways into and through homelessness

- Researchers and policy makers interested in the pathways into and through homelessness
 - Driven by a focus on critical intervention points
- Different pathways into and through homelessness in rural areas
 - Low income/deprivation as a critical pathway
 - Coach-surfing in the community
 - Lower levels of educational attainment
 - Poor quality housing stock, higher levels of over crowding and living in sub standard housing
 - Greater reliance on caravan parks, houseboats, tents and other informal dwellings
 - Inter generational homelessness, likely to be more pronounced in regional Australia and within Indigenous communities

Youth pathways into and through homelessness

- How do young people end up homeless?
 - Parent(s) repartner
 - Risk of sexual abuse
 - Conflict with birth parents
 - Inability by both parties to reconcile
 - Lack of money in the family/economic pressures
 - Guardianship of the Minister
 - Substance abuse

Youth and homelessness

- Youth in rural and regional areas at particular risk because of:
 - ‘Thin’ housing markets, that can be relatively expensive
 - No higher density housing
 - Few support services/homelessness services
 - Few employment opportunities
 - But often a reluctance to leave home community because of fear of losing community connections
 - Often little or no public transport
- Few services and very few services within their local communities
 - Often need to move to larger centres to obtain services
 - Or move to a capital city
- Many country towns and regional centres have little or no social housing
 - And what is available is not targeted at young people
- Moves may be forced by employment or labour market factors but are unsuccessful
 - Eg living in a tent while working as an apprentice in a meat works

Gender and homelessness in rural areas

- Violence in the home is a key pathway for women and children entering homelessness (one-third of all persons entering homelessness services are under 12 years)
 - Few domestic violence services in country towns
 - Locations are often known and may therefore not be secure
 - Moving elsewhere reduces level of community and family support.
- Higher rates of teenage mothers in rural and regional Australia
 - Reduces income and creates challenges in the housing market
 - Reduces participation in the labour market
 - Long term impacts
 - Fewer supports in schools for young people at risk of homelessness

Sexual identity and homelessness in rural areas

- LGBTI persons in rural and regional areas often struggle to be accepted by their families and communities
 - ‘Kicked out’ means loss of home
 - May be few options and few supports in regional areas
 - Note high rates of suicide amongst rural youth
 - May be forced to move to a capital city

From the McNair et al report ...

Experiences of or anticipated discrimination among LGBTIQ people who access homelessness services can also reinforce major disincentives to disclose diverse sexual orientations or gendered identities.

LGBTIQ young people who have experienced homelessness are at higher risk than their cisgender heterosexual counterparts of bullying at school, poorer mental health, experiences of trauma and childhood abuse, substance abuse issues, survival sex, STIs and HIV, multiple experiences and longer periods of homelessness. Moreover, family conflict and rejection because of their sexual orientation or gender identity has been identified as a major cause of homelessness for this group.

LGBTIQ young people are also more likely to have a first episode of homelessness before the age of 16.

Discrimination has been a major obstacle to safe and appropriate service provision.

Moreover, people with intersex variations are often subjected to medical treatments and surgeries with significant risks that can have negative long-term impacts on physical and mental health.

Researchers removed I for intersex, as no participants had an intersex variation.

Aboriginal Australians and homelessness in rural areas

- High rates of homelessness service use in many rural/regional and remote communities
 - Eg APY lands of SA
- “Transient nature of life” for many rural Aboriginal women
 - Overcrowding
 - Domestic violence
 - Food insecurity
 - Lack of trust of white mainstream services
 - English as third language
 - Poverty
 - Impacts of substance abuse
 - Repeat use of homelessness services

Figure 38: To what extent is homelessness a problem in your Council area?

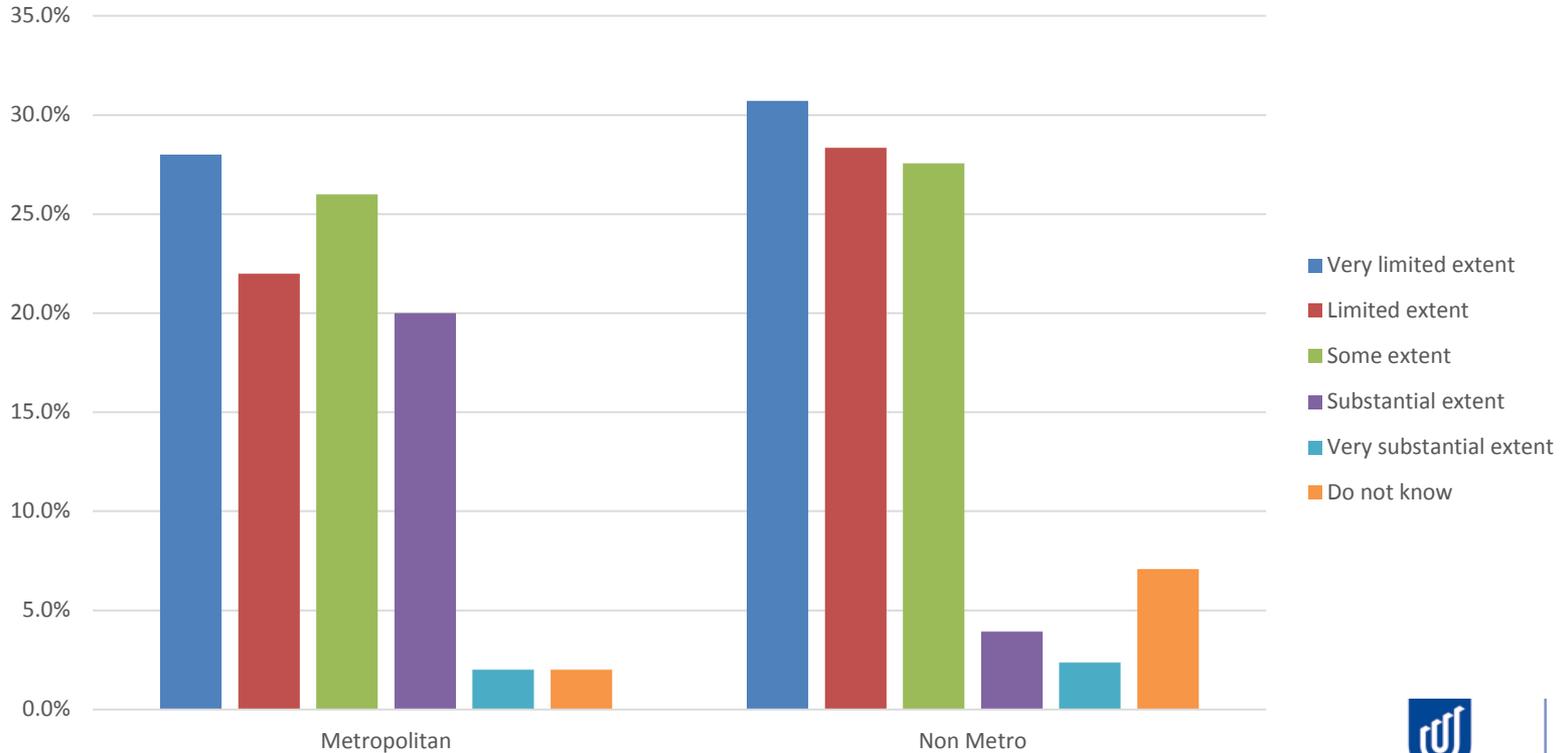
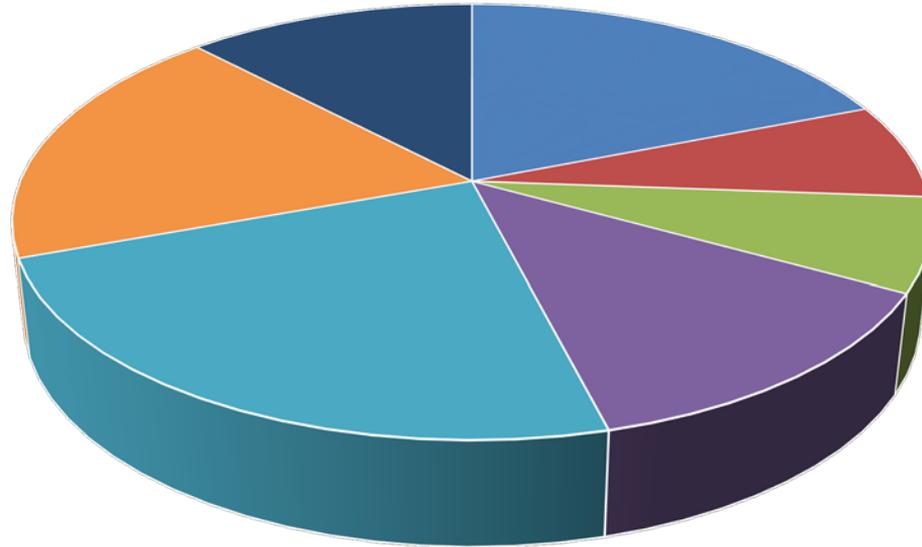


Figure 39: Is your Council concerned about the following forms of homelessness in your local area: [tick all that apply]



- Sleep in cars
- Are in transitional camps
- Are in boarding houses
- Live in tourist caravan parks/mobile parks
- Are rough sleepers (sleeping outdoors)
- Are couch surfers
- No, not aware of such people

Figure 40: Is it your perception that homelessness in your Council area has increased over the last 5 years

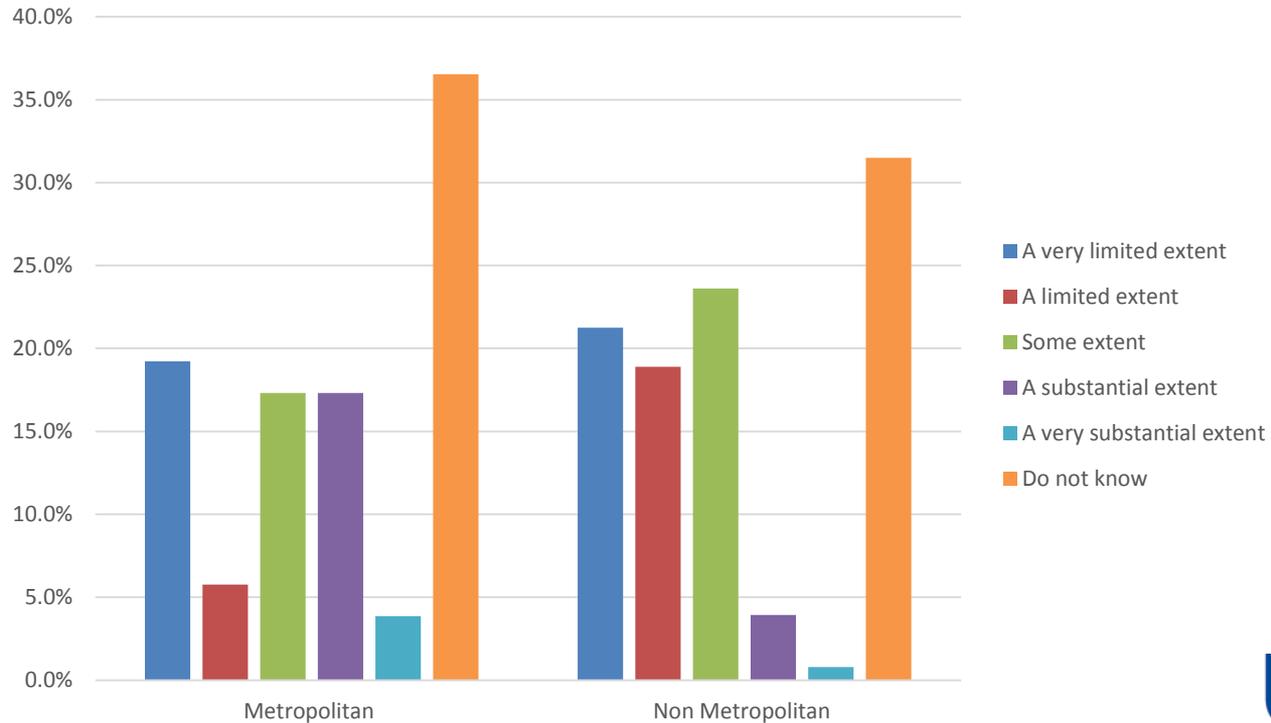


Figure 41: Does your Council have a formal homelessness policy or set of strategies?

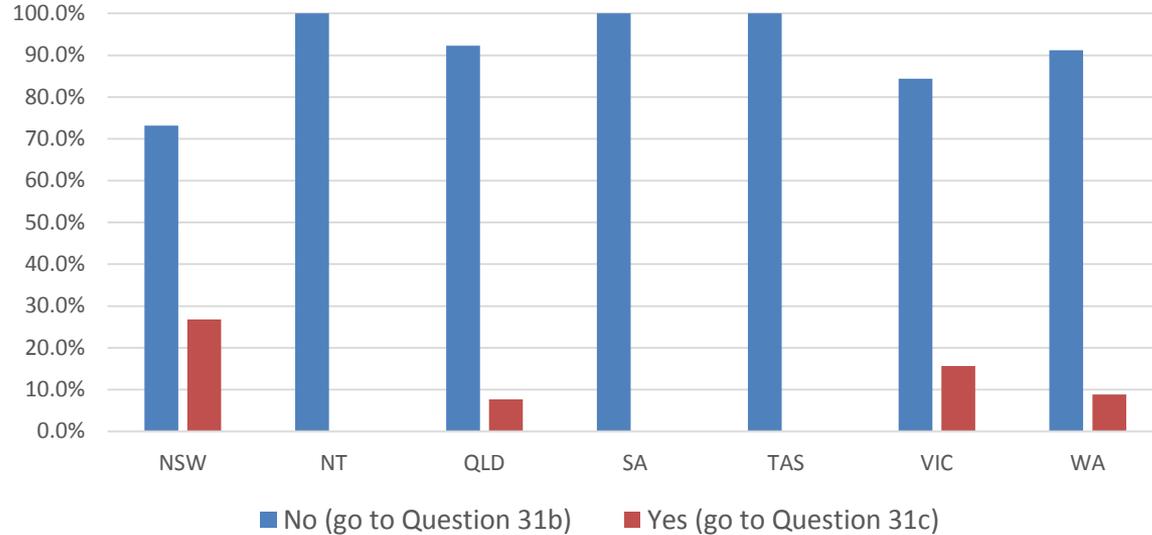


Figure 42: If no, does your Council have an informal policy or practices to support homeless people?

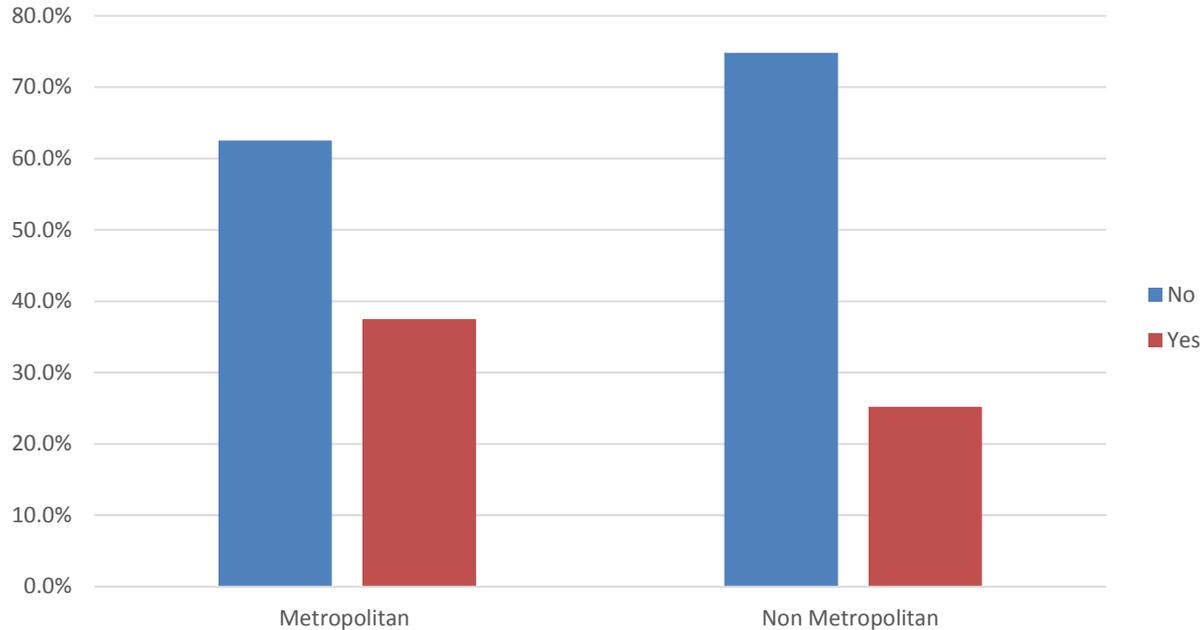
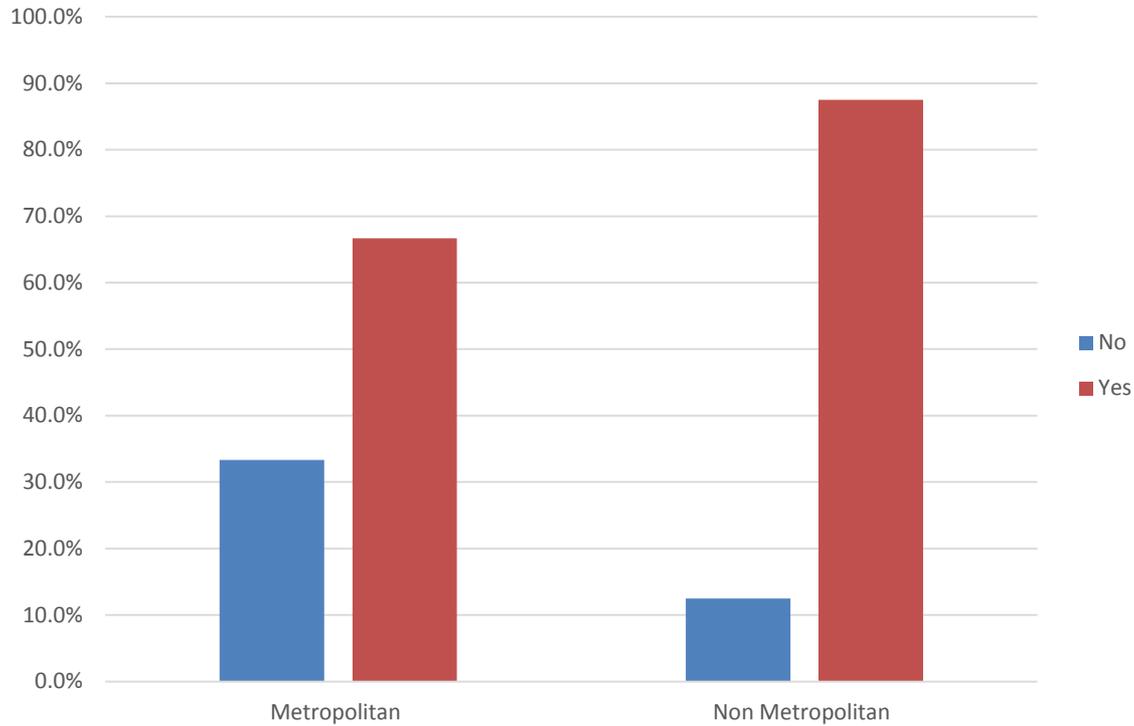


Figure 43: If yes, is this a standalone policy or does it sit within the broader plans/strategies?





Conclusion

- It's hard to provide services in rural and remote areas but
 - Could local councils do more?
 - What could state governments do, and how could a policy response be built across all parts of government – education, housing, ageing etc?
 - What role the community? Could community groups be mobilised to deal with this issue as a priority? What role philanthropic groups?
 - How do we build a more systematic evidence base to inform change?